



You Don't Mess Around With Jim by [justsomeotherguy](#)

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Family

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-23 13:35:38

Updated: 2017-12-23 13:35:38

Packaged: 2019-12-17 03:15:23

Rating: K

Chapters: 4

Words: 2,829

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Eleven has been listening to Hopper's album collection, and one of his favorite old singers may help them find a new connection. Post-Season 2, one-shots of humor, healing, and hope. (Now if it will just live up to that description!)

1. You Don't Mess Around with Jim

Stranger Things belongs to the Duffer Brothers; lyrics belong to the estate of the late great Jim Croce.

After they had cleaned up the dishes from dinner, Jim Hopper was watching a ball game he didn't really care about, and Eleven was getting ready to do her "homework" in the old school books he had scrounged up for her. She went to turn on the record player, selecting her current favorite album, the one she had first heard Hopper play when they cleaned up the cabin together. *You Don't Mess Around With Jim*, by Jim Croce. She carefully set the needle down, and crossed the little cabin back to the table and her books.

*Uptown got its hustlers,
Bowery got its bums,
42nd Street got Big Jim Walker,
He's a pool-shootin' son-of-a-gun.*

Hopper listened distractedly, glad she had shown so much interest in his record collection. It was something they both enjoyed, and it was good practice with language. Sometimes he saw her following the lyrics on the liner notes as she listened, pointing to them to keep her place and mouthing the words.

Yeah he was big and dumb as a man can come...

Wait, did she just snicker? Hopper glanced over from the TV. Eleven was looking down, writing in a workbook, but feeling his stare she glanced his direction for a second with a poorly concealed smirk still on her face. Yeah, she did, he thought. Hopper wadded up a page of the newspaper he had finished earlier and launched it at her head. Without looking up again, Eleven flicked a finger his direction and sent it sailing back to bop him in the nose.

Why he did what he did next would remain a mystery to him, but a childish impulse refused to let the kid get the best of him. He took one of the small pillows from the couch and threw it straight at her table. As expected, it slowed and reversed course toward him, but by

that time he had picked up the other pillow and side-armed it from a different angle. He had just long enough to see her eyes widen in surprise before both pillows stopped in mid-air, hovering threateningly.

When Hopper was reduced to cowering in the corner with the pillows pounding him about the ears, he admitted defeat. "Alright, alright! You win!" he shouted in disgust, hoping she would hear him over her own shrieks of laughter. The pillows fell to the floor, and Hopper sat down to watch TV again as though nothing had happened. But she wasn't done yet.

"Hopper?"

"Yeah?"

"No throwing things inside the cabin. It's a rule."

He sat silently for a moment, listening to the song as it continued.

"I never made that rule," he said.

"No." There was that sly look again.

"Smart-aleck."

*You don't tug on Superman's cape,
You don't spit into the wind,
You don't pull the mask off the ol' Lone Ranger,
And you don't mess around with Jim.*

Unless, he thought, you were a mop-headed little brat who knew how to push his every button. Hopper sighed. His mother would probably have said that he was "paying for his raising."

Author's note: Jim Croce (1943-1973) was an American folk-rock singer/songwriter who had two hit albums, *You Don't Mess Around With Jim* (1972) and *Life and Times* (1973), before losing his life in a plane crash at the age of 30. A third album, *I've Got A Name*, was still in the works and was released after his death.

Hopper and Eleven are ridiculously cute in season 2, of course, but also sometimes heartbreaking. They are so much alike (hard-headed, used to being on their own), and that's exactly what brings them into conflict, but it's also exactly why they need each other. In this series of one-shots I try to imagine how a common love of music (using the one singer we know Hopper likes from canon) might help them work through some of this. Especially him, because though Hopper started out to save Eleven, I think it's obvious from the much-noted blue bracelet that she is saving him too.

2. Time in a Bottle

Stranger Things belongs to the Duffer Brothers; lyrics belong to the estate of the late great Jim Croce.

*If I could save time in a bottle,
The first thing that I'd like to do,
Is to save every day till eternity passes away
Just to spend them with you.*

Hopper had forgotten the order of songs on the album, or he would have made an excuse to be out of the room already. "Operator" was bad enough, with its story of relationships broken beyond fixing. Did Eleven even realize how sad these songs were? But he didn't want to make her feel bad about listening to music, which was a lot better than watching soaps all day. He picked up the newspaper so she couldn't see his face, and pretended to read. The next stanza was the one.

*If I could make days last forever,
If words could make wishes come true,
I'd save every day like a treasure and then,
Again, I would spend them with you.*

In spite of himself, once again he was in the park, his wife and daughter setting out their picnic lunch on a blanket. It was the kind of lazy summer day that seemed like it would last forever. Sarah still felt good enough for outings like this; she hadn't yet started the treatments that would wreck her body in a desperate gamble to save her life. That song was on the radio as they drove to the park.

It was one of the last times they had like that, just a family enjoying a day out like nothing was wrong in the world. Diane reminded him to just enjoy it and keep it as normal as possible, for Sarah's sake, so he tried to put the news they had received from the doctor in the back of his mind. A head of golden tresses looked up at him, squinting in the late afternoon sun.

"Are you sad?" she asked.

Hopper jerked back to the present to face a head of thick brown curls instead, solemn eyes looking down at him over the newspaper with concern. Had she actually spoken? She looked at him expectantly but almost like she was afraid. Poor kid, he thought, she's seen so much misery she thinks everything bad is her fault. He cleared his throat.

"It's okay, kid. Something that happened a long time ago." He knew better than to lie, she could probably read his mind anyway. Without a word she sat next to him on the couch and leaned against his shoulder. He felt her head tilt up to look at his face again, though he avoided eye contact.

"You're crying."

"Yeah." He started to deny it, since the tears hadn't actually left his eyes. But she had already caught him.

"I'm sorry," she said, almost in a whisper. He wrapped his arm around her and drew her close.

"It's okay," he said.

*If I had a box just for wishes,
And dreams that had never come true,
The box would be empty except for the memory
Of how they were answered by you.*

Holding this troubled little girl (or was she holding him?), it seemed like something finally clicked into place. He had so many wishes for himself and Sarah-cheering for her at ball games, father-daughter banquets, teaching her to hunt and fish, scaring the daylights out of her first boyfriend. Watching her walk across a stage at graduation, or walking her down the aisle of a church. Dreams that would never come true. A future that was taken away.

And here, clinging to his side, was a confused, scared, lonely little girl, whose past had been taken away from her. Who never got to have even the childhood that Sarah had before she got sick. So maybe, Jim thought, some of those dreams could still come true for her.

*But there never seems to be enough time
To do the things you want to do, once you find them.
I've looked around enough to know
That you're the one I want to go through time with.*

Hopper leaned over and kissed the top of Eleven's head, and she snuggled closer. The thing is, he mused, you don't always get to choose who you go through time with. He knew there was a place in his heart for Sarah that would always hurt, that no one else would ever reach. But that didn't mean there wasn't room in his heart for another, and he needed to make up for lost time. For all their sakes.

Author's note: "Time in a Bottle" was supposedly written for Jim Croce's then-unborn son, A. J. Croce. This hit number one on the U.S. pop charts and was one of the first of his songs I remember hearing.

3. I'll Have to Say Love You in a Song

Stranger Things belongs to the Duffer Brothers, lyrics belong to the estate of the late great Jim Croce.

The ten o'clock news came to a close, and Jim Hopper stood up from the couch and switched the television off. He stretched to his full height, heading to the bathroom to brush his teeth and change for bed.

Passing Eleven's little room, he noticed something odd-the door was completely shut. She usually left it cracked a little, just enough to keep the bolt from catching. He had wondered if she would ever get over the terror of being confined. When she voluntarily shut the door, she was probably up to something. His heightened senses detected a sound. She was-singing?

She had a clear, sweet voice, completely unaffected. Of course Hopper immediately thought of Sarah's singing, her piping little voice now a long-ago memory. Eleven's voice was very different, darker and more haunting, but it was strangely satisfying to hear someone singing again in his home.

*Well I know it's kind of late,
I hope I didn't wake you.
But what I've got to say can't wait;
I know you'd understand.
Every time I tried to tell you,
The words just came out wrong,
So I'll have to say I love you in a song.*

That could go for both of them, Hopper thought, even if it was a love song really. Neither one of them was good at understanding or expressing their feelings, her because she had never learned how, and him because he had quit trying. The both needed to get over that.

She stopped, and Hopper held his breath, wondering if she realized he was listening outside. It was really hard to sneak up on a kid with psychic powers. Then he heard her again.

"Over," she said. There was a crackle of static from the SuperCom walkie-talkie.

Oh for crying out loud, Hopper thought, she's singing it to the Wheeler boy. His conclusion was confirmed by a syrupy gush of compliments pouring from the walkie. He couldn't quite make out what Mike was saying, but he was pretty sure he didn't want to know. He sighed. Mike Wheeler was a good kid, but these kids were in way too deep with each other. Saving each other's lives and a year of forced separation could do that. Then he heard Eleven speak again.

"Sorry, Mike, wait a minute. Over." The door flew open and before Hopper had a chance to think of an excuse he was looking down at a glaring Eleven, sitting on the bed with the SuperCom in her hand and murder in her eyes. (Which could actually happen, he thought to himself uneasily.) His mind raced for something to say, but he was saved from that set of poor choices when she took control of the conversation.

"DAAAAA-aa-aaa-aaaa-aaa-AAAAAADDDDD!" she said, stretching the word out to several syllables to emphasize her disgust. (Hopper would later puzzle over the question of how, in isolation, she managed to come to the same intonation of that word as every other teenager he had ever known. Was it from TV? Or was it coded in the hormones?)

There was no hiding the fact that he had been standing there listening, and the lights were flickering ominously, so Hopper raised his hands in surrender and retreated with as much dignity as he could. He would worry about the lovesick teenagers singing love songs into the ether another day. For tonight, he would just try to get through his head that she had actually called him that name.

Author's note: This and the next chapter quote songs from Croce's posthumous album, *I've Got a Name*. The song in this chapter was written for his wife Ingrid, and yes, he did actually wake her up to sing it to her as an apology for having spent so much time away on the road.

4. I've Got a Name

Stranger Things belongs to the Duffer Brothers, lyrics belong to the estate of the late great Jim Croce.

Hopper sat up on the couch with a crick in his neck, having slept through the TV program he had stayed up to watch. He hated falling asleep early like that, because he would likely make up for it by lying awake half the night. In his fuzzy state of mind he gradually realized there was another sound besides the voice of the weatherman on the late news. He heard Eleven singing again.

She was sitting at the little table in the kitchen with some practice worksheets, probably trying to finish them up before Mike came over the next day to go over them with her. And as her pencil scraped against the paper, she was singing.

*Like the pine trees lining the lonely road,
I've got a name, I've got a name.
Like the hootin' owl and the croakin' toad,
I've got a name, I've got a name.*

She stopped and looked up, having seen Hopper's movement in the other room. He saw that she had that solemn, thoughtful expression that meant she had just come to a conclusion about something. He knew her well enough now to recognize it, and to brace himself.

"Hopper." she said.

"Yeah?"

She paused a second and smiled just a little bit. "No. It's my name." She looked down at her papers again, and he thought she was finished. But she spoke up again.

"I've got a name too." She held up the worksheet, where she had filled in the required blanks, even though it wouldn't be turned in to a teacher.

"First name, Jane. Last name, Hopper. Like my Dad." She smiled, a real smile this time.

"Yeah, that's right," he said around the lump in his throat. That kid, he thought. He had spent years putting up walls around that part of his life, and she walked through them like they weren't even there. She had so much guts, after all she had been through, to even try to trust another person, it made him a little ashamed that he had shut down for so long. No more of that. He knew should probably give such a statement more acknowledgment than "Yeah, that's right," but it was kind of hard to know what to say. He cleared his throat and changed the subject.

"Jane, I'm glad you like that music. I like to hear you sing." She smiled again, not with embarrassment like he expected, just happy. She started in again on another verse.

*Like the north wind whistling down the sky,
I've got a song, I've got a song.
Like the whippoorwill and the baby's cry,
I've got a song, I've got a song.*

Hopper pretended to watch the TV but couldn't hear anything except that clear, sweet voice. Had she ever sung before, growing up at the lab? Had anyone ever sung to her? He was amazed once again at how this kid managed to survive, not only physically but emotionally. She had so much will to live, and not only to live, but to have a life. He was starting to remember the difference now, himself. Maybe he should check the price on that guitar hanging in the window of the pawn shop, he thought. He smiled. Tomorrow would be a brighter day, for both of them. He was sure of it.

Author's note: That's all, I should quit while I'm ahead. Thanks for reading, and happy holidays!